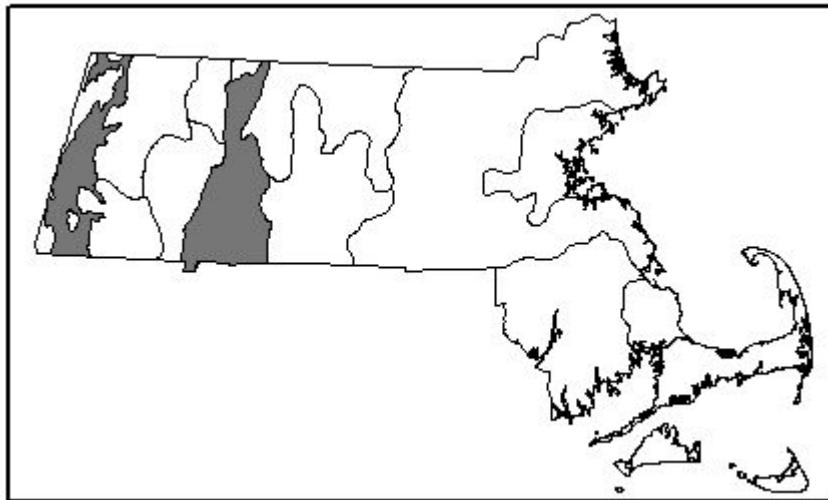


**Community Name:** CALCAREOUS ROCK CLIFF COMMUNITY

**Community Code:** CT2A2C0000

**SRANK:** S3



**Concept:** Extremely sparse vegetation, in cracks and small ledges of nearly vertical cliff faces. A more diverse community than found on Acidic Cliffs.

**Environmental Setting:** Vertical, or close to vertical, exposures of resistant limestone, dolomite, or other calcareous bedrock; cliffs often include ledges and have talus slopes below. There is minimal soil development. Surroundings tend to be northern hardwood forest, sometimes rich mesic forests. Calcareous rock outcrop and summit communities may occur above, although much calcareous rock in Massachusetts is overlain by more resistant acidic rock. The moister ledge communities are usually mid-slope dolomite ledges or cliff faces with little soil.

**Vegetation Description:** The vegetation is distinct and specific to the habitat. Purple cliff brake (*Pellaea atropurpurea*), bulblet fern (*Cystopteris bulbifera*), maidenhair spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*), blunt-lobed cliff-fern (*Woodsia obtusa*), walking fern (*Asplenium rhizophyllum*), and columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) are characteristic species of vascular plants. Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) and harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) grow in drier open sites, and moister, shaded sites have early saxifrage (*Saxifraga virginensis*), rock-pellitory (*Parietaria pensylvanica*), small enchanter's nightshade (*Circaea alpina*), and rock-cresses (*Arabis hirsuta*, *A. lyrata*, and *A. laevigata*). Lichen and moss grow on the rock face and in small cracks. Surrounding forest often includes sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), white ash (*Fraxinus americana*), basswood (*Tilia americana*), butternut (*Juglans cinerea*), and black and yellow birches (*Betula lenta* and *B. alleghaniensis*).

**Associations:**

**Habitat Values for Associated Fauna:** All types of cliffs provide nesting habitat for Ravens (*Corvus corax*) and, in the past, Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) nested on cliffs before being extirpated from Massachusetts in 1955, and the Peregrine Falcons released in urban areas since 1984 have not returned to the natural habitat, although they are breeding in the state. Cliffs were probably the native habitat of the Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*). No mammals, reptiles, or amphibians would be expected on the steep cliff faces.

**Associated Rare Plants:**

AMELANCHIER SANGUINEA	ROUNDLEAF SHADBUSH	SC
ARABIS LAEVIGATA	SMOOTH ROCK-CRESS	T
ARABIS LYRATA	LYRE-LEAVED ROCK-CRESS	T
ASPENIUM RUTA-MURARIA	WALL-RUE SPLEENWORT	T
ASPENIUM X EBENOIDES	SCOTT'S SPLEENWORT	- WL

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

CRYPTOGRAMMA STELLERI  
PARIETARIA PENNSYLVANICA

FRAGILE ROCK-BRAKE  
ROCK PELLITORY

T  
- WL

**Associated Rare Animals:**

NONE KNOWN

**Examples with  
Public Access:**

Mt. Toby, Sunderland; Bartholemew's Cobble Reservation (TTOR), Sheffield;.

**Threats:**

Rock climbing can break plants off of the cliff face, remove small pockets of soil, and wear lichens off of the rocks. Distinct trails appear on heavily used cliffs. Development in the vicinity of cliffs, most cliffs themselves are seldom directly threatened by development.

**Management Needs:**

**Synonyms**

**USNVC/TNC:**

includes: Cystopteris bulbifera Sparsely Vegetated Alliance -- Cystopteris bulbifera Sparse Vegetation [Provisional] [CECL004394]; Includes some of: Asplenium ruta-muraria - Pellaea atropurpurea Sparsely Vegetated Alliance -- Asplenium ruta-muraria - Pellaea atropurpurea Sparse Vegetation.

**MA (old name):**

SNE CALCAREOUS CLIFF COMMUNITY.

**ME:**

**NH:**

1994 - Calcareous Cliff community.

**VT:**

In part: Calcareous Cliff Community.

**NY:**

Calcareous cliff community.

**CT:**

**RI:**

**Weatherbee:**

Southern Calcareous Cliff Community.

**Author:**

P. Swain

**Date:**

7/1/99